Anger Management and Coping Skills

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Hospitals Crack Down On Tirades By Angry Doctors

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At a critical point in a complex abdominal operation, a surgeon was handed a device that didn't work because it had been loaded incorrectly by a surgical technician. Furious that she couldn't use it, the surgeon slammed it down, accidentally breaking the technician's finger. "I felt pushed beyond my limits," recalled the surgeon, who was suspended for two weeks and told to attend an anger management course for doctors.

The 2011 incident illuminates a long-festering problem that many hospitals have been reluctant to address: disruptive and often angry behavior by doctors. Experts estimate that **3 to 5 percent** of physicians engage in such behavior, berating nurses who call them in the middle of the night about a patient, flinging scalpels at trainees who aren't moving fast enough, demeaning co-workers they consider incompetent or cutting off patients who ask a lot of questions.

- Anger is not a condition, it's a symptom that your life is unbalanced. If you get insufficient sleep, go without breakfast, spend every day – including weekends – working, rarely exercise, and have no time for yourself, you'll be prone to extreme irritation and anger.

- Anger also doesn't tend to exist by itself, especially when it is chronic or excessive. Frequently people who have explosive tempers and/or who cope with anger by lashing out physically will also have a number of other symptoms, such as anxiety, unstable moods, a tendency toward impulsive behavior including problems with drugs or alcohol and an odd contradictory feeling toward those close to them, characterized by a deep fear of being abandoned mixed with discomfort whenever they get too emotionally close to others.

Myth: I shouldn't "hold in" my anger. It's healthy to vent and let it out.

Fact: While it's true that suppressing and ignoring anger is unhealthy, venting is no better. Anger is not something you have to "let out" in an aggressive way in order to avoid blowing up. In fact, outbursts and tirades only fuel the fire and reinforce your anger problem

Myth: Anger, aggression, and intimidation help me earn respect and I get what I want.

Fact: True power doesn't come from bullying others. People may be afraid of you, but they won't respect you if you can't control yourself or handle opposing viewpoints. Others will be more willing to listen to you and accommodate your needs if you communicate in a respectful way.

Myth: I can't help myself. Anger isn't something you can control.

Fact: You can't always control the situation you're in or how it makes you feel

Fact: You can control how you express your anger express your anger without being verbally or physically abusive

- you always have a choice about how to respond

Myth: Anger management is about learning to suppress your anger.

Fact: Never getting angry is not a good goal

Anger is normal

- Anger will come out regardless of how hard you try to suppress it
- Anger management is about becoming aware of your underlying feelings/needs and developing healthier ways to manage the emotional upset
- The goal is to express anger in constructive ways.

Internal stress: Are you making yourself stressed?

Stress doesn't always come from our external environment; it is often self-generated

- Worrying about things that are out of our control
- Automatic Negative Thinking (ANT)
- Criticizing ourselves
- Imagining the worst
- Holding unrealistic standards
- Taking on too many responsibilities

Anger can be a cover-up for other feelings

In order to meet your needs and express your anger in appropriate ways, get in touch with your feelings

Are you truly angry?

- Is your anger an expression of embarrassment, insecurity, hurt, shame, or vulnerability?

If your first response in difficult situations is anger, it is likely your temper is covering up your feelings

- Especially likely if you grew up in a family where expressing feelings was strongly discouraged. As an adult, you may have a hard time acknowledging feelings other than anger.

Clues that there's something more to your anger

Compromising is difficult and you experience feelings of failure and vulnerability

- Family members observed engaging in out of control anger, may role model for a child that the loudest and most demanding behavior gets needs/wants met

Clues that there's something more to your anger

You have trouble expressing emotions other than anger

- Do you pride yourself on being tough and in control and never letting your guard down?
- Do you feel you have the emotions of fear, guilt, or shame under control?
  - Everyone has those emotions, and if you think you don't, you may be using anger as a cover for them

Clues that there's something more to your anger

You view different opinions and viewpoints as a personal challenge

- If you have a strong need to be in control, you may interpret perspectives different from yours as a challenge to your authority, rather than simply a different way of looking at things.

Anger control and management Tip 1: *Explore what's really behind your anger*

Out-of-control anger behavior can stem from what you've learned as a child

- Family members who scream, hit or throw things, role model for a child that anger is expressed in this manner

- Traumatic events and high levels of stress can make one more susceptible to anger as well

Anger control and management Tip 2: *Be aware of your anger warning signs and triggers*

- Knots in your stomach
- Clenching your hands or jaw
- Feeling clammy or flushed
- Breathing faster
- Headaches
- Pacing or needing to walk around
- “Seeing red”
- Having trouble concentrating
- Pounding heart
- Tensing your shoulders

Identify the Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) that Trigger Anger

- **Overgeneralizing**
  - "You always interrupt me. You NEVER consider my needs. EVERYONE disrespects me. I NEVER get the credit I deserve."
- **Obsessing on "shoulds" and "musts."**
  - Having a rigid view of the way things should or must be and getting angry when reality doesn't line up with your vision
- **Mind reading and jumping to conclusions**
  - Assuming you "know" what someone else is thinking or feeling—that he or she intentionally trying to upset you, ignore your wishes, or disrespect you.

More ANTS

- **Collecting straws**
  - Looking for things to get upset about, usually while overlooking or blowing past anything positive. These irritations can build and build until you reach the “final straw” and explode, often over something relatively minor.

- **Blaming**
  - When anything bad happens or goes wrong, it’s always someone else’s fault. You blame others for the things that happen to you rather than taking responsibility for your own life.

Anger control and management Tip 3: *Avoid people, places, and situations that bring out your worst*

- Stressful events don't excuse anger
  - Identify stressful events that affect you
    - take control of your environment
    - avoid unnecessary aggravation
    - Look at your regular routine and try to identify activities, times of day, people, places, or situations that trigger irritable or angry feelings.
      - You get into a fight every time you go out for drinks with a certain group of friends.
      - Traffic on your daily commute drives you crazy.
  - Consider ways to avoid these triggers or view the situation differently so it doesn't make your blood boil.

Anger control and management Tip 4: *Learn ways to cool down*

Once you know how to recognize the warning signs that your temper is rising and anticipate your triggers, you can act quickly to deal with your anger before it spins out of control

Tips for cooling down

- **Focus on the physical sensations of anger**
  - Tune into the way your body feels when you're angry this can lessen the emotional intensity of your anger
- **Take some deep breaths**
  - Deep, slow breathing helps counteract increasing tension. Breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible into your lungs.
- **Exercise**
  - Walk around the block
    - This releases pent-up energy so you can approach the situation with a cooler head

More Cooling Down Tips

- **Use your senses**
  - Take advantage of the relaxing power of your sense of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste.
    - Listening to music
    - Visualize a favorite place
- **Stretch/massage areas of tension**
    - Roll your shoulders if you are tensing them
    - Gently massage your neck and scalp
- **Count to ten**
    - Still out of control by the time you reach ten, start counting again

Give yourself a reality check

- How important is it in the grand scheme of things?
- Is it really worth getting angry about it?
- Is it worth ruining the rest of the day?
- Is my response appropriate to the situation?
- Is there anything I can do about it?
- Is taking action worth my time?

Anger control and management tip 5: *Find healthier ways to express your anger*

- If you determine the situation is worth getting angry about and there's a positive benefit to addressing the issue, express your feelings in an assertive manner.

- Anger can be a tremendous source of energy and inspiration for change when it is communicated respectfully and channeled effectively.

Pinpoint what you're really angry about

- Have you ever been in an argument over something silly?
  - Big fights can happen over something small, like a towel left on the floor or being ten minutes late. But there's usually a bigger issue behind it.
  - If you find your irritation and anger is rapidly rising in a situation, ask yourself "What am I really angry about?"
    - Identify the source of frustration and communicate your anger respectfully, take constructive action, and present a resolution.

Take five if things get too heated

- Take a brisk walk
- Go to the gym
- Listen to some music to:
  - Calm down
  - Release pent up emotion
- Re-approach situation when you have a cooled down

Fight fair

- **Make the relationship your priority**
  - Maintain and strengthen the relationship is the first priority
    - Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint
- **Focus on the present**
  - It's easy to start bringing up past grievances
  - Focus on what you can do to solve the present problem
- **Choose your battles**
  - Conflicts can be emotionally draining
    - Determine if the issue is worth your time and energy
    - Others will take you more seriously when you are upset if you are judicious in your choices of conflicts

Fight fair

- **Be willing to forgive**
  - Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive
  - Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives
- **Know when to let something go**
  - If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree
    - It takes two people to keep an argument going
    - If a conflict is going nowhere-
      - disengage and move on

Coping

Nutritional Support

- Nutrition experts indicate carbs can make you feel good, but that feeling doesn't last. "They don't give your body what you need to cope with day-to-day stresses," The experts also agree that there is a connection between anger and food "Deficiencies in nutrients, magnesium or manganese, vitamin C, or some B vitamins may make a person hyperactive towards a stressor, a short fuse so to speak,"

Nutritionists say if you eat plenty of fish, eggs, beans, fruits and green leafy vegetables, you should have the nutrients you need. People who tend to eat a diet loaded with processed or packaged foods could find themselves more easily irritated.

Dr. Drew Ramsey says without the proper nutrients, the body can't make chemicals like serotonin which is necessary for clear thinking and good mood.

"Deficiencies in these nutrients have been correlated strongly with either increases in aggressive behavior and/or violent acts,"

Coping

- **Meditation**
  - Meditation is an effective way to produce feelings of calm and relaxation. The main action of meditation is to keep the mind free of thoughts and just be. There are many different methods of meditation, so people should do some experimenting to determine which one suits them best. Some examples including concentrating on the visual image of a candle, concentrating on the particles of the inner eyelid or picturing white light surrounding the body.

Coping

- **Deep Breathing**
  - Use deep breathing to invoke a sense of peace and calm and to counteract rising tension. Concentrate on the breath going in and out of the lungs to take the focus off the source of the anger. It is important to take deep breaths rather than breathing shallowly from the chest, as that technique is not as effective. One way to ensure this happens is to use a specific deep breathing technique:
    - Close the mouth and inhale breath through the nose for approximately 4 seconds
    - Hold for 7 seconds
    - Release the air through the mouth for 8 seconds. This has a tranquilizing effect on the nervous system and will alleviate anger.

Coping

- **Exercise**
  - Physical activity or exercise can help someone feel calmer. Take a brisk walk around the block or non-strenuous yoga-like exercises, the endorphins released during exercise will relax the muscles and assist in feeling relaxed and calm.

Coping

- **Feel the Anger**
  - Tuning in to the physical affects of anger on the body might actually lessen the intensity of feelings. Allow thoughts of anger and give them proper recognition before attempting to alleviate the feelings using Mindfulness Techniques

Coping

- **Massaging and Stretching**
  - If full-fledged exercise is not possible, stretching or massaging muscles can have the similar beneficial affect of relieving feelings of anger.
    - Gently massage the neck, scalp, shoulders or temples. In addition, move the head slowly from side to side or front to back to stretch the neck muscles, stretch arms above the head, arch the back or bend sideways at the waist.

Coping

- **Visualization**
  - Visualize the sights, smells, sounds, touch and tastes of a relaxing experience or place can alleviate anger. The place or experience pictured can be from a favorite memory, something seen in a book or on television, or an image completely made up from a person's imagination, says the American Psychological Association. The focus should be on the relaxing experience, which will shift attention from the source of anger and calm frayed nerves

Coping

- **Affirmations or Counting**
  - Mental or verbal affirmations or counting can help the rational mind regain control over anger feelings.
  - Saying a word or phrase such as "relax" or "I am calm" can help soothe feelings of anger. Repeat until control is re-established. Using this technique in combination with deep breathing can be particularly effective.

When to seek help for anger control issues

- Your anger continues to be unmanageable, despite implementing the anger management techniques, if you're getting into trouble with the law or hurting others, you need assistance
- Seek help from therapists, classes, and programs for people with anger management problems
  - Asking for help is not a sign of weakness
  - You'll find others in the same shoes
  - Receive direct feedback on techniques for controlling anger can be tremendously helpful

Consider professional help if:

- You feel constantly frustrated and angry no matter what you try
- Your temper causes problems at work or in your relationships
- You avoid new events and people because you feel like you can't control your temper
- You have gotten in trouble with the law due to your anger
- Your anger has led to physical violence